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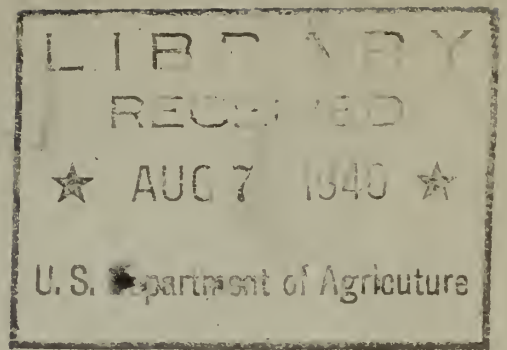
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As I See It



WARNER W. STOCKBERGER

As I See It

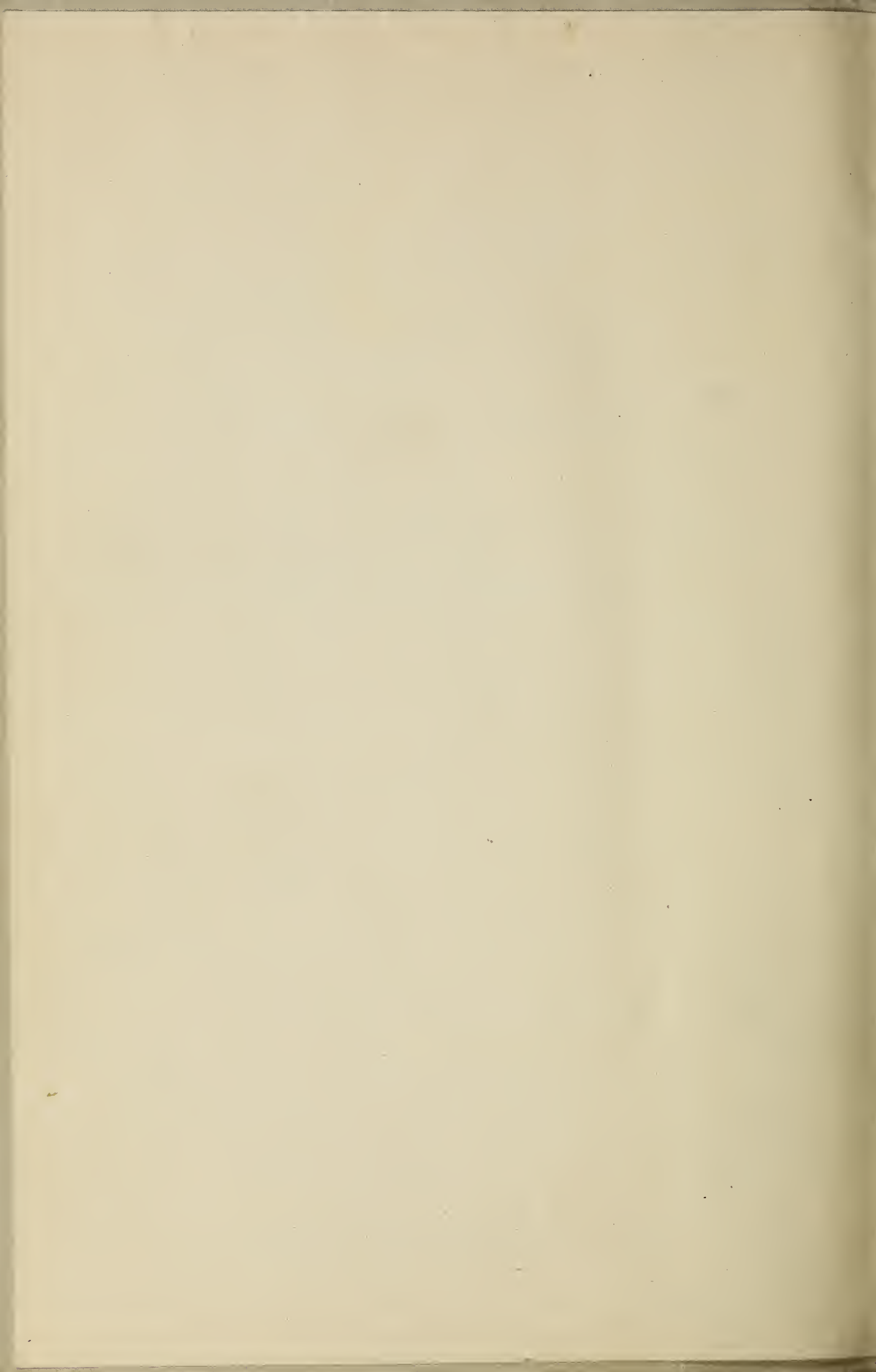
36 Essayettes of 100 Words

BY

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Warner W. Stockberger

Long ago he was a research worker with drug plants and a division chief in the Department of Agriculture. But his hobby was studying and improving human relationships among employees. Nowadays this is called personnel administration.

The hobby became his life work when he was appointed the Department's first Director of Personnel in 1924, the year after the Classification Act was passed by Congress. He held this post until 1938. And because of his pioneering achievements, the Department became widely known as a leader in wise personnel administration.

These miniature essays are distilled from a rich experience in human relationships.

Each of them is exactly one hundred words long—almost as brief as a Chinese poem. Each presents a different facet of a philosophy of work—particularly a philosophy of work for people in the Government service.

Doctor Stockberger took time to think. These little essays grew out of contemplation as well as experience. They reveal the man better than anything that could be said about him.

He never regarded employees in the Government as masses of people. They were always individuals.

The essays are the thoughts of an individual addressed to individuals about fundamental things that concern each of us.

—THE EDITORS.

Civil Servants

Civil servants may well ponder the disrespect for the government service which exists in the minds of many citizens. This attitude of the public is clearly expressed in an article entitled, "Your Civil- and Uncivil-Servant," which not long since appeared in a leading magazine.* The cause of this attitude as well as the remedy lies within the body of civil servants themselves.

Civil servants must realize that they are responsible to their employer, the public, and that the time has long since passed when valid alibis can be produced for the failure of public servants to gain public approbation.

* Harper's Magazine, April 1937, pp. 502-8.

Democracy

Everybody is talking about democracy these days. It is often thought of merely as a form of government but it is more than a form of government. It is the embodiment of the right of every individual to have a voice in the consideration of problems which relate to his welfare or destiny.

Every human relation is governed either in the democratic way or in the autocratic way. In administration, the democratic way provides for freedom of individual expression and, through cooperative effort, seeks to gain voluntary compliance with those policies or procedures which majority opinion considers ^{the} most desirable.

Interdependence ✕

The assumption that some kinds of work have greater virtue or are more worthy than others suggests an attitude of snobbish superiority or exclusiveness. In a large organization there are many distinct kinds of work to be done. They require different degrees of responsibility, skill, experience or training. They are mutually interdependent for each is necessary to some other kind of work. Without someone to dictate letters, there would be no work for stenographers; and if there were no stenographers, dictation could not be taken. Obviously all the kinds of work required in an organization are equally deserving of respect.

Intolerance

These are difficult and dangerous times, reminiscent of twenty years ago. Many of us bear the name of ancestors who fled from intolerable oppression in a foreign land and found a haven of freedom in the American Colonies. They became industrious, peaceful and law abiding citizens. Many served with honor under the flag of their adopted country. Yet, during the unreasoning hysteria of twenty years ago, their descendants were suspected of disloyalty to the land of their birth. Surely we are wiser now than we were then, less ready to permit hatred and prejudice to control our thoughts and feelings.

Knowledge

One of the amazing things about learning is that of many things we thought we knew we come to realize we know next to nothing at all. We also come to realize that interest in many things is directly proportional to our knowledge of them. Lack of interest in such common subjects as arithmetic, history or geography is frequently traceable to defective teaching in youth; and lack of interest in art, music, drama, etc., indicates lack of knowledge of these subjects. Whoever declares them a waste of time should be pitied for his ignorance, not accepted as a competent critic.

Discipline ✓

No one is fully competent to enforce discipline upon others before he has first learned the art of self-discipline or self-control. This implies not only the control of emotional impulses but also the ability to consider impartially all the facts bearing upon the case. The literal application of the dictum, "Like penalties for like offenses," may readily lead to grave injustice. It is pertinent to inquire when offenses are "like" and on what basis likeness is determined. Offenses nominally or superficially alike may in reality differ so greatly that uniformity in the corrective measures applied would in effect be discriminatory.

Government Progress

Effective government must be responsive to the constantly occurring changes in economic and social conditions. Government employees must have the opportunity to keep abreast of the progress of events which are related to the part they play in the execution of public policy. Organized in-service training is a promising means of increasing the ability of employees to meet the demands of government for an increase in their competence. In-service training is nothing new in the government service, but heretofore it has not been well organized. By direction of the President, there are now being established comprehensive programs of in-service training.

Bureaucracy ✕

Bureaucracy has a bad name and is quite generally believed to be synonymous with tyranny, inefficiency or stupidity in government. But bureaucracy is bad only when the persons comprising it make it so. There is little or nothing to fear from a bureaucracy which is dominated by capable employees who have high ideals of public service. Bureaucracy is not a form of government. It is rather a mechanism through which public employees actuated by unselfish and humanitarian motives endeavor to serve the best interests of the state. They should be proud of the derisive term "bureaucrat" often applied to them.

Voluntary Cooperation

Voluntary cooperation means nothing to a dictator; he enforces involuntary compliance. Voluntary cooperation means much to the skilled administrator; he develops it by ethical methods. Cooperation means joint action, mutuality of interest. It implies participation as equals. Cooperation and compulsion are mutually exclusive. Enlightened methods of directing human effort should form a substantial part of every training program for executives. They must be taught that patience and persuasion are more effective than pugnacity and parade of power in promoting better morale, better performance and voluntary cooperation among employees, and that supervision is more than giving orders and commands to others.

Supervision

Supervision, an important element in administration, is often one of the weakest. From a mercenary point of view supervision is merely a means to secure the greatest possible output of effective work from employees within a given unit of time. The hard-boiled supervisor who harshly berates his employees on the slightest provocation, who ignores their right to courteous and considerate treatment, and uses fear to drive them to their work, may honestly hold the erroneous opinion that his methods produce the most satisfactory results. However, more than likely he is merely burning incense on the altar of his own self-conceit.

Independence Day

It is not generally known that two Declarations of Independence were proclaimed on July 4, 1776. Early settlements in West Branch Valley near Williamsburg, Pennsylvania, made on Indian lands, were not subject to civil law. The settlers governed themselves through a committee known as "fair play men." The settlers and fair play men of the wilderness, unaware of what was transpiring in Philadelphia on the same day because of the slowness and difficulty of communication, assembled on the plain above Pine Creek and passed resolutions absolving themselves from all allegiance to Great Britain and declaring themselves henceforth *free and independent*.

Symbolism

Once a farm lad, bored by following the plow day after day, complained of the monotony to his father. "But," said the father, "I like plowing." "Why?" asked the son. Replied the father, "I like to see the dirt turning over." Not until years later did the son fully appreciate what the father may have seen in plowing, his dream of waving fields of grain to come, of the future harvest, of comforts and conveniences which the crop would provide for his wife and children. Plowing to him was not monotonous since it unrolled before him a vision of life.

The structure of every organization, irrespective of its functions or objectives, is erected upon the primary assumption that a few will command and the many will obey. The localization of final authority and power at the top level of the structure establishes the organization as an autocracy in fact. Administration, conditioned by the form of the organization and following the line of least resistance, tends primarily to become autocratic. Administration becomes democratic when it is motivated by supreme respect for human personalities and encourages them to work jointly for the common good on a basis of critical justice and equality.

Henry David Thoreau, essayist and naturalist, once said, "It is not enough to be busy: so are the ants. The question is: what are we busy about?" Are clerical workers required to compile endless data for which there is no real need? Are executives so busy with minor details that they have little or no time for more important matters? Are scientists industriously compiling and publishing papers which make no real contribution to the progress of science? In fact, are we all running around in circles uttering shrill cries and making believe that movement in any direction is necessarily progress?

Attitudes

Attitude is a state of mind which may find expression in behavior or conduct. Education, associations, experience and environment in part determine the formation of our attitudes. Since these differ for different individuals so will their attitudes differ. The attitude of an individual may vary with circumstances, e. g., toward a superior, toward a subordinate, a child, a stranger or a solicitor for the community chest. Attitudes are not always logical, reasonable, justifiable or sensible. Often they are a definite stumbling-block to an individual's progress and advancement. They can be modified or changed through critical self-analysis and will power.

Folklore

The old-time farmer, weather-beaten of face and with hands gnarled and thickened by toil, knew much about agriculture not learned from books or in college halls but gained through keen observation while in daily contact with nature. He was a discriminating observer of wind and weather, of sowing and reaping, of the causes of good or ill fortune to plants and animals. Less skilled in interpreting than in making observations, his sayings created a folklore which the learned scientist has largely repudiated because of alleged conflict with accepted theories. Nevertheless, the observations were sound and would repay careful study today.

Interest in the work which one has to do may follow either of two directions. It may be centripetal, tending to focus sharply on a limited field; or it may be centrifugal, dispersing over a wide area. Centripetal interest leads to narrow specialization, stifles curiosity about related fields, and avoids opportunities for gaining information from all sources considered "too far off from the subject." Centrifugal interest leads to intellectual growth and broadness of vision. It explores the periphery of the subject as well as the center. It overlooks no opportunity for extracting useful information from sources remote from the subject.

Conservationsm~~en~~ vs. Progress

Conservatism is a deep-seated human trait which is often manifest as fear of or opposition to any change in the existing order of things; yet without change there would be no progress. The imagination conjures up all sorts of dire possibilities from an impending change, but anticipation is often fantastic when compared with realization. Rumors of a proposed change in organization unduly disturb and alarm the personnel.

Organizations must change to keep pace with social and economic progress and to avoid fossilization. Opportunities for advancement are far greater in progressively changing organizations than in those where ultra-conservatism constantly inhibits progress.

Incentives

There are two powerful incentives which shape the attitude of an individual towards his work. One is the desire to experience that inner glow of satisfaction which comes as a result of having done his work well; the other is the hope of recognition and approval by those who can appreciate and value his work. Contrary to what many people believe, the second incentive contributes most to what is really worth while. Certainly there is no more enduring recompense for conscientious effort faithfully expended than the realization that it has found favor with or been of service to one's fellow-men.

Vocabulary

Keen observers have pointed out as a significant fact that great business executives have command of unusually large vocabularies and that the clarity and precision of their diction always arrests attention. Although the process of acquiring a comprehensive vocabulary does not forthwith transform a person into a great executive, it does develop the ability to present ideas forcefully and effectively.

The wearisome repetition of hackneyed words and phrases in ordinary discourse, and the conversational profanity with which the speech of some individuals is abundantly interlarded, seem to be merely mechanisms for concealing deficiencies in vocabulary or absence of serious thought.

Freedom

Poets and orators have apostrophized freedom since the birth of our nation. But as a people we may come by unthinking to take our present freedom too much for granted and forget the travail of men's souls by which it was finally established. Material progress, which freedom made possible, brings forgetfulness of the lessons of the past and paves the way for dangerous philosophies which threaten the intellectual and political freedom of our citizenry. Then let us all resolutely set our minds and hearts against each and every false doctrine which imperils that sacred heritage, the idea of human freedom.

Organization ✕

Some men appear to regard themselves as discredited or to have displayed a lack of executive ability if an official superior fails to approve their recommendations. This false measure of their ability may lead them to omit, conceal, or even misrepresent facts which might adversely affect the decision. When this occurs the interests of the organization are subordinated to the vanity or self-pride of the one who makes the recommendation. The superior is entitled to have all the facts, and the withholding of pertinent ones may readily cause him to render decisions prejudicial to his own reputation as an executive.

Loyalty

In all human relationships much importance is rightly attached to loyalty. Instilled in early youth it becomes an unconscious habit at maturity. Since the human relationships of each employee are many and diverse he will necessarily have many loyalties. There will be his loyalty to the department, bureau, division and section as well as loyalty to superiors, fellow workers, church, societies, friends and family. To determine where, among all these, the deepest loyalty lies is a difficult problem. Extreme loyalty to one may easily result in some disloyalty to another. There is danger also of mistaking enthusiastic partisanship for loyalty.

Hard Work

It is a truism that any form of self-expression worthy of the name requires the expenditure of energy, sustained effort, keeping in touch with actuality, surmounting obstacles, striving to reach a definite goal—in short, hard work. But this is exactly what some persons try to escape, preferring to allow the hours of their free time to slip by without making any effort to accomplish anything. They become envious of others whose work has won preferment but for themselves consider work an imposition by someone else. Thus they neglect splendid opportunities for self-expression which would bring them equally rich rewards.

Irretrievableness

Once a word is spoken or an action taken they have gone beyond recall. James, the psychologist, once said, "Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out." A promise unfulfilled, an untruth uttered, an unjust criticism, trust betrayed, bitter words spoken in anger, all inflict wounds which time may heal but the scars will remain. They cannot be removed by ignoring their existence for the mind can never be closed to the memory of what they represent. As a direct result, human relations are impaired and emotional tensions developed which are inimical to cooperative and productive effort.

Democratic Leadership^x

The autocratic ideology is so deeply ingrained that not infrequently those who prate loudest of democratic leadership fail in the consistent practice of what they preach. The cloak of democracy, worn becomingly when dealing with equals, is all too readily discarded for the garb of autocracy when dealing with individuals in the lower levels of authority or responsibility. Leadership is truly democratic only when and to the extent that it provides and maintains opportunity for the exercise of individual freedom to the greatest degree possible under those disciplines or restraints which must be imposed if freedom is to be preserved.

Efficiency Ratings x

Probably no efficiency rating system can be devised that will give results satisfactory to all who are rated by it. By recognizing the need for efficiency ratings the validity of the assumption that all employees are not equally efficient is admitted. It follows, therefore, that some will be rated high, others low. Employees are well aware that their associates differ in efficiency. If all were rated high, the really efficient would have just cause for dissatisfaction. But the less efficient, unconvinced that a low rating is deserved, often manifest dissatisfaction. So the rating officer's lot is not a happy one.

Administrative Responsibility x

The impact of powerful forces directed to bring about further extensive changes in the existing social order; the problems presented by technological advances on many fronts; the continuous extension of the complicated economic mechanisms under which organizations must operate; all these make imperative reappraisal of administrative responsibility. It is a part of that responsibility to visualize the organization as a social group; to articulate its energies with those of other social groups whose cooperation is essential; to orient objectives, policies and administrative processes to existing social conditions; and to take account of increased public awareness of human needs and rights.

Accident of Circumstances

The accident of circumstance is far more important than deliberate planning in shaping individual careers. Two persons of equal ability and attainments obtain identical positions in the same organization but in different bureaus or divisions. In one, turnover in the higher positions may be rapid, thus affording opportunity for frequent promotion; in the other, it may be negligible, bringing little or no opportunity for advancement. Again, unforeseen events may bring prestige to one, leaving his equally capable colleague unknown. So the accident of circumstance plays its part, barring opportunity for one and opening to the other the pathway to success.

Allegiance to Position

Individuals who are vested with substantial authority or responsibility sometimes arrogate to themselves the loyalty, deference, honor, or respect which is the rightful due of the position rather than of its occupant. Such persons do not appreciate the full significance of the statement, "Individuals come and go; the position continues on." This distinction must be understood by the rank and file of an organization if morale is to be maintained when there is a change in leadership. Obviously a change in leadership affords no justification for withholding or curtailing that continuing allegiance which the position of leader claims by right.

Thanksgiving Day

On this day we Americans have cause to be truly thankful: . . . For the guaranties of personal and individual freedom symbolized by the flag which floats over our homeland. For the constitutional guaranties that protect minorities in their rights as citizens. For the tolerance towards race and creed which is a recognition of the brotherhood of man. For the spirit of humanitarianism that is opposed to the hatred and prejudice now rampant in the world. For the opportunity through active and daily use of our minds to work toward the goal of democratic liberty. For the privilege of being American citizens.

Morale x

Morale is an attitude or state of mind which is reflected in behavior or conduct with respect to enthusiasm, confidence, courage, hope, loyalty, zeal and analogous feelings. Morale is fundamentally important in successful administration. To the able executive the production of high morale becomes an actuality, not a pious sentiment. Low morale, in general, is either an index of the degree of supervisory ability, or a symptom of untoward circumstances affecting the situation in which employees are placed. Morale may be suddenly vitiated by some shock or blow to the sensibilities or it may slowly crumble from lack of stimulation.

Curiosity

Although it is often alleged that curiosity killed the cat, no one has adduced valid evidence of the fatality. On the other hand, the lack of inquiring and laudable curiosity has here and there killed the chances of persons for recognition and advancement. The lack of curiosity inclines to narrow-mindedness, acceptance of routine, circumscription of interest, and indifference to the ideas that engage the serious attention of others. Active curiosity may be purposefully directed and transformed into a desire to acquire knowledge. The natural result will be continued learning, sustained thinking, and the development of a versatile and open mind.

Experience

The assumption that the value of experience is directly proportional to its duration or length, is a fallacy. Experience of three, five or ten years in some line of work is, in itself, no guarantee of a corresponding increase in knowledge, skill, or in ability to do the work in hand. Indeed, long, unvaried experience may be a liability rather than an asset. It tends to develop habits of thought and action which eventually become routines in which flexibility and adaptability undergo atrophy. Duration cannot measure the true value of experience. It must be appraised in respect to knowledge gained.

Release of Human Energy

The release of sustained and effective human energy and its diversion into channels of cooperative endeavor or productive work is one of the major objectives of organization. The agents of release which awaken the most zealous and enduring response are psychological rather than material in nature. They facilitate the progress of employees toward fulfillment of their ambitions. Among these agents are loyalty and fidelity to the purpose of the organization; the assumption of responsibility; pride of craftsmanship; desire for approbation or esteem of colleagues and associates; desire for prestige; desire for admiration because of accomplishment; and the ideal of service.

Tolerance

Tolerance, one of the virtues of democracy, is closely related to several other virtues among which are forbearance, sympathy, understanding, reason, justice and freedom. He who is tolerant exercises forbearance when passing judgement upon the opinions or acts of others. His sympathetic understanding leads to recognition of the right of the private individual to follow his own convictions if he does not invade the rights of others or transgress established bounds. Reason governs his attitude towards religious or political beliefs different than his own. His sense of justice makes of him an ardent supporter of the cause of human freedom.

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